

Yorkshire Water shooting position statement

The way that upland catchments are managed has a big effect on the quality of the water that flows into our reservoirs, how much water is stored in the catchments, and the speed at which water flows down the catchments. Well managed catchments can reduce the risk of flooding and improve water quality, reducing the amount of treatment it needs before being supplied to customers. Healthy catchments also help to combat climate change by sequestering carbon, as well as providing additional benefits such as the amenity of the landscape, biodiversity and conservation, recreation and the provision of jobs and economic benefits for those who work in the catchments.

Yorkshire Water owns around a third of the land that forms our reservoir catchments. The reason we own this land is to give us more control over what happens on that land to help manage the three priority areas of water quality, water quantity and carbon sequestration.

In order to maximise the potential from catchments, they need management. We work with a range of different tenants and stakeholders on our own land, including agricultural, sporting (shooting) and other recreational tenants, to carry out this management. Many of the agricultural tenancies can be very long lasting spanning several decades. In some areas where we own land, the shooting rights are owned by other people meaning that we have no or very limited control over their actions. This is a result of decisions taken many decades ago when the land was acquired by our predecessor organisations and the rights were “severed” from the freehold of the land.

As a result, there is a complex picture of activity on our land and we need to work with a range of partners to ensure that land is managed in a way that works for everyone.

We want to make the most of our influence and ensure that the activities are consistent with our three priorities for land, so we recently reviewed the activities that we allow to take place on our land. As a result of this review, we’ve made some changes to our approach with sporting leases and when they come up for renewal.

When an existing shooting lease comes up for renewal, we will undertake a thorough review to assess the best option to deliver the required land management for the future. This will be done using our innovative six capitals approach, which assesses the benefits to natural, social, human, manufactured, intellectual and financial capital. This approach ensures all potential benefits of an option are quantified and assessed.

There are a range of potential options that we might consider, and we’ll work with partners to understand what these might be and to establish sound data and evidence that is scientifically accepted.

We will be transparent about what our assessments show and how we make decisions about the future of land management.

In some cases, our six capitals assessment may show that continuing to lease the land for shooting is the best option for a particular catchment. If this is the case, we would still consider granting the tenancy, but we’re making changes to our approach:

- We will re-write our tenancy agreements to include stricter requirements to restore and improve the natural environment. Tenants will be required to agree to work with Yorkshire Water, Government agencies and other stakeholders to carry out improvements, enhancement or restoration programmes if they want to take long term leases.

- We will include a presumption against burning as a land management technique in our leases. Tenants will only be allowed to burn in exceptional circumstances where they can demonstrate that intervention is needed but alternative measures aren't safe to deliver. They will also need the appropriate approvals from Government regulators.
- Our tenancy agreements already include a clause which automatically terminates the lease of anyone convicted of a wildlife crime. However, we will review these clauses to make them as robust as possible to ensure a zero-tolerance approach to wildlife crime.

Over many years we have established positive long-term partnerships with sporting tenants both on our land and other landowners' holdings and these have enabled us to deliver significant water and wider environmental improvements through land management. The changes outlined above will help to deliver even more improvements for our land, either in partnership with sporting tenants, or with other partners.

We of course understand that leasing land for shooting can be seen as controversial. However, shooting is a legal activity and we do not take a view as to whether that is something that should change and we will respect the views and beliefs of both supporters and opponents of shooting.